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Unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/183, entitled "Unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries". In accordance with that resolution, the Secretary-General invited the Governments of all Member States to provide their views or any other relevant information on the issue of unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries. The comments and observations received from Belarus, Burkina Faso, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Jamaica and from agencies of the United Nations are reproduced in this report.

The responses from Member States generally expressed disagreement with the imposition of unilateral economic measures as instruments of political and economic coercion against developing countries. Such actions are viewed as contrary to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the norms of international law and the rules-based multilateral trading system, which undermine the sovereign equality of States. The responding United Nations regional commissions reported the continued application of unilateral coercive economic measures affecting the following Member States: Cuba, Myanmar, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Sanctions also continued to apply against the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 62/183, entitled "Unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries". In that resolution, the Assembly, inter alia, urged the international community to adopt urgent and effective measures to eliminate the use of unilateral coercive economic measures against developing countries that were not authorized by relevant organs of the United Nations or were inconsistent with the principles of international law as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and that contravened the basic principles of the multilateral trading system.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to monitor the imposition of measures of that nature and to study the impact of such measures on the affected countries, including the impact on trade and development, and to report to the Assembly at its sixty-fourth session on the implementation of the resolution.

3. Accordingly, the Secretariat, in a note verbale dated 22 May 2009, invited the Governments of all States to provide their views or any other relevant information regarding the existence of any unilateral sanctions and the impact these may have had on their trade and development. As at mid-July 2009, four member States — namely, Belarus, Burkina Faso, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Jamaica — provided views and comments as requested in the note verbale. The texts of those replies are reproduced in annex I to the present report.

4. Relevant organizations, programmes and agencies inside and outside the United Nations system were also invited to provide information and analyses concerning recent developments in the subject area. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) responded to that invitation. The texts of replies received from those three regional commissions are reproduced in annex II to the present report.

II. Summary of replies received from Member States and United Nations bodies

5. The comments of Member States generally expressed disagreement with the imposition of unilateral economic measures as instruments of political and economic coercion against developing countries. Such actions are viewed as contrary to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the norms of international law and the rules-based multilateral trading system, which undermine the sovereign equality of States. Belarus supports the efforts of the United Nations to prevent such practices and to minimize any damages to countries that have suffered from unilateral sanctions. Burkina Faso believes that unilateral economic measures present an obstacle to socio-economic development of affected States. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which identifies itself as one of the countries subjected to coercive economic measures, expressed an urgent need for such measures to end. Jamaica assured the Secretary-General that the country has not promulgated any law, legislation or other action that would infringe on the sovereignty of any other

State. Jamaica further urges all other Member States that have, and continue to apply, such measures to abide by calls made by the General Assembly to repeal or invalidate those measures as soon as possible.

6. The comments of ECLAC addressed issues concerning recent developments in the almost five-decade-old embargo imposed by the Government of the United States against Cuba, which ECLAC viewed as a special case of the application of unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against a developing country. ESCAP reported the latest developments regarding the continued application of unilateral economic measures in Myanmar and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. ESCWA provided a summary of latest developments of three economies — the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic — that were previously reported to have been adversely affected by unilateral economic measures as a means of economic and political coercion.

Annex I

Replies received from Member States

Belarus

[Original: Russian]
[29 June 2009]

The Republic of Belarus does not practise and condemns unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries. While supporting United Nations efforts to eliminate the practice, Belarus believes that it would be useful to the United Nations system to pay increased attention to concrete steps to prohibit it and to mitigate the damage to countries that have been the victims of unilateral sanctions.

Burkina Faso

[Original: French]
[10 July 2009]

1. The Permanent Mission of Burkina Faso to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Secretariat of the United Nations, and, with reference to its note of 22 May 2009 on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 62/183, has the honour to transmit the following information:

2. Burkina Faso has always advocated the peaceful resolution of disputes between States.

3. Burkina Faso therefore wishes to express its opposition to unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries.

4. Burkina Faso believes that such measures:

- Arouse feelings of injustice, frustration and outrage in the targeted States;
- Exacerbate tensions and prejudice the good working relations that ought to prevail between States;
- Curtail the socio-economic development of targeted States and call into question their sovereignty;
- Constitute a serious breach of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the multilateral trading system.

Islamic Republic of Iran

[Original: English]
[2 June 2009]

1. The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and, with reference to the communication of the Secretariat dated 22 May 2009 and paragraph

four of resolution 63/7 entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba", would like to provide the following observations:

2. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran reiterates its position that the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba runs counter to the principles of international law governing relations among States and contradicts the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, which calls for promoting solidarity, cooperation and friendly relations among nations. Such measures continue to adversely affect the living conditions and human rights of the Cuban people and to hamper the efforts of the Cuban Government to achieve the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. In this context, the embargo is constraining the efforts of the Government of Cuba to eradicate poverty and hunger and to promote health and education, which are indispensable means for the achievement of economic and social development.

3. The adoption of the relevant resolutions, with such a wide range of support and for so many years, clearly indicates the strong objection of the international community to unilateral economic coercive measures in general and the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed against Cuba in particular. Furthermore, as the international community is facing major challenges such as the global financial and economic crisis and thus increased poverty, unemployment and malnutrition, the imposition of embargoes and sanctions are more unjustifiable than ever and merit stronger objections and appropriate reaction at the global level.

4. The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly rejects the application of unilateral economic and trade measures by one State against another that affect the free flow of international trade and financial resources, as well as the extraterritorial application and effects of national legislation on the sovereignty of other States. Such actions are contrary to the principles of international law, the sovereign equality of States, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and peaceful coexistence among States.

5. The Islamic Republic of Iran, being itself subject to economic coercive measures, shares the concern of the Cuban people and Government and therefore, emphasizes the urgent need to put an end to such measures and for the full implementation of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 63/7.

Jamaica

[Original: English]
[1 July 2009]

1. The Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the United Nations has the honour to provide the following report in connection with resolution 62/183:

2. The Government of Jamaica remains opposed to the adoption of unilateral coercive measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries. In addition to being contrary to the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, such measures contravene the sovereign equality of States and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

3. For this reason, the Government of Jamaica has not promulgated any law, legislation or measure, or taken any other action, that would infringe on the sovereignty of a State or its lawful national interests.

4. The Government of Jamaica therefore reiterates the call made by the General Assembly urging all States that have applied and continue to apply such measures to take the necessary steps to repeal or invalidate them as soon as possible.

Annex II

Replies received from United Nations bodies

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

1. In its contribution to the report of the Secretary-General on unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) reported the following contribution to the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 63/7, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba", which is considered a specific case of the subject of the present report.

Economic background

2. The period of steady improvement in the economic and social situation in Cuba during the present decade came to an end in 2008 and early 2009. The economy was hit by a combination of external shocks such as high international petroleum and food prices in the first part of 2008, followed by an unusually destructive hurricane season. The former affected the Cuban economy adversely by increasing the petroleum bill and the food bill, thus crowding out other imported goods, given the foreign currency restriction Cuba faces. It is estimated that the increase in international prices of food resulted in an additional cost of close to $840 million in the form of imports.

3. The impact of natural disasters was related to three hurricanes and one tropical storm whose accumulated damage in 2008 has been estimated by the Government of Cuba at $9.7 billion, which is equivalent to almost 20 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). This has to be compared against the sum of all damages resulting from hurricanes in the period 2000-2007, estimated at $9.1 billion.

4. One of the most visible consequences of the hurricanes was the destruction of the housing stock. Some 530,000 housing units were damaged, and almost 90,000 destroyed. Given that the capacity of the Cuban economy to build housing units is around 50,000 per year, it will take almost two years to recover to the pre-2008 level of housing.

5. As a result of these two shocks, the economic growth in 2008 was a mere 4.3 per cent against the projected 8 per cent. The ongoing economic crisis in the world is exerting a toll on the Cuban economy as well, so economic growth is projected in the best case scenario at 3 per cent. Given that the first quarter has seen a growth of GDP of only 2.8 per cent, the best case scenario is most probably out of reach.

Effects of the United States embargo

6. The embargo imposed by the Government of the United States of America on Cuba has been in place for almost five decades, adversely affecting the standard of living of Cuban citizens and the normal functioning of the Cuban economy. It has direct and indirect effects on all sectors of the economy. The United States has been

imposing this unilateral policy on other sovereign countries in the world with measures such as the Torricelli Law (1992) and the Helms-Burton Act (1996).

7. According to the estimation of the Cuban authorities, the accumulated direct damages of the embargo amount to more than $90 billion. During the Bush administration, additional sanctions and more severe retaliation and punishment against individuals, companies and sovereign nations were adopted, thus increasing the scope and intensity of the embargo.

8. As a result of that policy, some sectors, such as food production and public health, have been especially affected, with grave social consequences. Cuba is forced by the embargo to import medicine, medical equipment and health-enhancing products from faraway countries, raising shipping costs substantially. In addition to this and given the uncertainty introduced by the embargo, Cuba has to maintain large inventories, thus incurring additional costs.

9. In the agriculture sector, the embargo has reduced the possibility and increased the costs of buying inputs like fertilizers and seeds, and technology and equipment that will increase productivity and reduce production costs. Given the strategic importance of food, the Government of Cuba has been obliged to keep additional stocks of food in order to provide an uninterrupted supply to the population in general.

10. The Cuban Government has invested heavily in an ample programme to update the transport sector, with visible effects in terms of improvement of transport services to the public and the economy in general. However, the embargo has impeded faster modernization of that sector, and has made it more costly.

11. The construction sector has also been a victim of that policy. Cuban enterprises cannot import from the United States materials and equipment necessary for the construction of hospitals, schools, housing units and roads. Given the widespread destruction by the hurricanes in 2008, reconstruction in the housing sector will be much slower because of the embargo.

12. There has been some, but still limited, progress regarding the economic embargo with the Obama Administration assuming power at the beginning of 2009. The vast majority of measures against Cuba are still being applied rigorously, however.

13. The change has come in the realm of restrictions on Cuban Americans regarding travel to Cuba, sending family remittances and expanding the range of goods that can be shipped to Cuba as donations. Some opening up of the telecommunication services by United States enterprises is also being proposed.

14. However, this limited change of stance stands in stark contrast to other long-standing measures, such as the ban on travel to Cuba that affects American citizens in general. Cuba is the only country in the world that American citizens are not allowed to visit.

15. The new measures do not affect fines imposed by the United States Government on individuals and enterprises that infringe the embargo by exporting to Cuba, importing from Cuba, or organizing trips to Cuba, or by other forms of dealings with Cuba and its citizens. Needless to say, this affects third parties, as a result of which Cuban enterprises have a very limited choice of possible foreign partners. The persecution of Cuban commercial and financial transactions with third

parties has continued, elevating the costs not only for Cuba, but also for the citizens and enterprises from other nations.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

1. In its contribution to the report of the Secretary-General on unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries, ESCAP provided the following update from the previous report (A/62/210):

Myanmar

2. Since the last report, a number of countries have extended the period of their existing unilateral economic measures against Myanmar. The measures include an arms embargo, restrictions on investment and non-humanitarian aid, asset freezes and visa bans on a number of officials and their families, and trade and investment bans for a number of enterprises from the country. While lack of data prevents a full appraisal of the impact of the measures, the measures have resulted in an economic cost to the country by impeding its ability to develop a more diversified economy through greater insertion in world trade.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

3. Since the last report, unilateral economic measures continue to be applied by various countries against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The measures primarily relate to exports to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea of materials used in sensitive industries, and the ban on exports of luxury goods to the country. Additionally, some countries have frozen the foreign assets of some officials of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. While none of the measures cover trade in food and non-luxury items, the effect of the measures as a whole is to prevent the full engagement of the country in the international economy, which would provide greater opportunities for economic development and poverty reduction.

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

1. In its contribution to the report of the Secretary-General on unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries, ESCWA reported the following:

Occupied Palestinian Territory

2. In the light of the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, a caretaker government that excluded Hamas was formed in the West Bank. Although that has led to the end of the boycott by the European Union (EU), the United States and Israel of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, the EU-United States boycott of the Hamas-controlled Gaza institutions remained in place. Furthermore, Israel has imposed a near total blockade on the Gaza Strip since the second half of 2007. The conditions laid out by Israel to lift the blockade on the Strip include security and political dimensions. This has led to a steep economic decline in the Gaza Strip resulting in a humanitarian crisis. In addition, construction materials, spare parts and

other industrial goods remain, for the most part, banned, thereby impeding reconstruction and recovery. The 2008 unemployment rate for the Gaza Strip is estimated at an average of about 40 per cent, while poverty rates were already as high as 80 per cent in 2007, and are expected to be higher in 2008-2009. Economic activity has been reduced to its minimum, based on food aid, public employment and the "tunnel economy".

Sudan

3. Since November 1997, the United States Government has imposed comprehensive unilateral economic sanctions against the Sudan, including a total asset freeze against the Government, restrictions on imports from and exports to the Sudan, and restrictions on financial transactions, as well as sanctions on companies linked to the Government of the Sudan. In October 2006, the United States issued a new executive order that continued the countrywide blocking of the Government of the Sudan but allowed more transactions with the Government of Southern Sudan and removed it from the scope of the blocking authority. In response to continuing violence in Darfur, in December 2007, the United States Government signed the Sudan Accountability and Divestment Act, which authorizes State and local governments to divest from companies doing business in named sectors in the Sudan. While the Sudan has enhanced its economic relations with countries such as China and of the EU in recent years, the socio-economic impact of United States sanctions on the Sudan is difficult to accurately assess.

Syrian Arab Republic

4. The United States sanctions imposed on the Syrian Arab Republic in 2004, which prohibit all exports of goods, except food and medicines, from the United States to the Syrian Arab Republic, were renewed for one year in May 2009. The EU and a number of Arab countries remain large trading partners of the Syrian Arab Republic.

United Nations

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Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities through the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 63/150 and focuses on the situation of persons with disabilities with respect to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and on lessons learned and synergies and complementarities achieved, based on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The report provides information on the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of the Millennium Development Goals and the implementation of the World Programme of Action and the efforts towards mainstreaming disability in development.

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Introduction

1. The present report is divided into three sections. Section I discusses the linkages between disability and the Millennium Development Goals. Section II analyses the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of the Goals, including information from Millennium Development Goals country reports, discussion of Millennium Development Goal monitoring and data on disability and actions and initiatives towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities by Member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The report concludes with section III, which offers conclusions and recommendations. The preparation of the report was facilitated by an expert group meeting entitled "Mainstreaming disability in Millennium Development Goal policies, processes and mechanisms: development for all", organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO) and held in Geneva from 14 to 16 April 2009.

I. Disability and the Millennium Development Goals

2. The World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, the Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognize persons with disabilities as both development agents and beneficiaries in all aspects of development.

3. The periodic review of the Millennium Development Goals provides an entry point for the assessment of how persons with disabilities fare in comparison to the population at large in relation to achieving the Goals, particularly poverty eradication, universal primary education, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS.

4. While persons with disabilities make up an estimated 10 per cent of the world's population, it has been suggested that disability could be associated with 20 per cent of the global population living in poverty.[1] Notwithstanding the commitment of the United Nations to the rights of persons with disabilities and the recognition by the 2005 World Summit Outcome[2] of the immediate need for persons with disabilities to be able to exercise their rights without discrimination, disability is largely invisible in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals. The terms "disability" and "persons with disabilities" do not appear in the Millennium Development Goals nor in the targets and indicators that operationalize Millennium Development Goal-related efforts. They are also missing from the accompanying guidelines, policies, programmes and conferences that are part of ongoing efforts related to the Millennium Development Goals. As a consequence, periodic reviews of the Millennium Development Goals that are under way within the United Nations do not include reference to disability issues or persons with disabilities.

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[1] World Bank, 2005. Development outreach: disability and inclusive development, July 2005 (Washington, D.C.).

[2] General Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 129.

5. A series of conferences and meetings on disability and the Millennium Development Goals were organized by Governments, regional organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities. These meetings led to insightful discussions and recommendations on how to mainstream disability and include persons with disabilities in all Millennium Development Goals. However, this body of work has not yet reached outside the disability community itself.

II. The situation of persons with disabilities in the context of the Millennium Development Goals

A. Millennium Development Goal country reports: a desk review

6. An analysis of the references to persons with disabilities in Millennium Development Goal country reports may provide valuable information about the extent and ways in which disability and persons with disabilities are included in programmes and policies. With this in mind, the Secretariat conducted a desk review of 80 such country reports from all regions from 2003 to 2009.[3] The following are the preliminary findings based on data available to the Secretariat.

7. A total of 42 reports (52 per cent) made some reference to disability or persons with disabilities. These references included causes of disability, issues of concerns or challenges, and initiatives. Of those 42 reports, 16 included a reference to one or more initiatives specifically directed towards persons with disabilities. Twenty-eight reports mentioned disability in reference to "vulnerable" or "marginalized" groups or population "in need of special attention". It may be noted that references to persons with disabilities in the context of population groups could be understood as an effort to mainstream disability. Other references were more specific to disability and persons with disabilities. None of the references provided detailed information nor elaborated on the issues or programmes concerned.

8. Some reports noted that persons with disabilities are among the poorest of the poor, the most deprived, and vulnerable; and that they tend to fall outside the reach of social services provided by the Government. They also recognized that special measures or attention might be required for persons with disabilities.

9. Most references to disability were related to social protection and safety nets (Goal 1), and education (Goal 2). Two reports contained data which show that the participation of persons with disabilities in gainful employment is very low. When they work, persons with disabilities receive remuneration that is significantly lower than that of non-disabled workers and in very few instances are work conditions adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities. According to the country report of Thailand (2008), for instance, less than half the number of people with disabilities was employed and they received on average only two thirds of the income earned by other workers. In Serbia, it was reported that, in 2005, only 13 per cent of persons with disabilities had an opportunity to work, one third of them had working conditions adapted to their need. Although the problems of unemployment and unequal pay are prevalent throughout the world, the lack of reference to these issues

[3] Selected Millennium Development Goal country reports are available in English, French and Spanish at the United Nations Development Group and United Nations Development Programme Millennium Development Goals websites, and are searchable electronically.

in other country reports could be a reflection of the generally low priority given to the employment of persons with disabilities.

10. In the area of education, issues and challenges include access to adequate education for persons with sensory, physical and developmental disabilities; weak identification and assessment mechanisms of children with disabilities to ensure adequate education; and difficulty and high cost of providing primary education to those with disabilities in geographically disperse areas. The country report from Thailand provides an illustrative case, namely, that approximately three quarters of people with disabilities either had no education or less than a primary education.

11. One reference to gender perspectives (Goal 3) was made in relation to women as caregivers of persons with disabilities, while another report stressed the need to understand how gender equality was affected by different factors, such as disability. The only initiative mentioned specific to women with disabilities was a one-time financial assistance for women with disabilities.

12. References to access to obstetric, prenatal and post-natal care for women and children (Goals 4 and 5) were made only in the context of how the lack of adequate access is a cause of disability, but no reference was made to access to this care by women and children with disabilities. Other causes of disability mentioned are malnutrition among children (Goal 1) and vaccine-preventable diseases (Goal 4).

13. One report made reference to the vulnerability of persons with disabilities to the effects of HIV/AIDS (Goal 6), owing, perhaps, to the lack of preventive education, given the presumptions made about the absence of sexual activity among persons with disabilities, or to the lack of accessibility to information and adequate services and treatment. Another report mentioned the impact of environmental degradation on persons with disabilities (Goal 7), as it adds additional barriers and difficulties to their everyday living situation.

14. Initiatives mentioned in the reports are related to inclusive education, health care and rehabilitation, pensions and cash benefits. Examples of initiatives specific to persons with disabilities include: a disability survey in 2002 (Maldives, 2007); a registry of persons with disabilities (Chile, 2005); a Prevention Programme for Disabled Persons (Croatia, 2005); a Service of Personal Assistants to Persons with Disabilities programme (to encourage persons with disabilities to become active and to work) (Serbia, 2005); policy for persons with disabilities; incorporating disability reduction targets in the National Health-Care Policy (Liberia, 2004); taking steps towards inclusive education (Bahrain, 2007; Chile, 2005; Fiji, 2003; Kazakhstan, 2005; Kenya, 2005; Serbia, 2005; Thailand, 2008 and the United Republic of Tanzania, 2006); and a conference on the rights of persons with disabilities (Brazil, 2007). One report mentioned that the poverty reduction strategy emphasizes the urgent need to devote special attention to vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities (Serbia, 2005).[4]

[4] Mention of persons with disabilities among other groups were made in relation to the following initiatives: poverty reduction efforts (Burkina Faso, 2003; China, 2008; Fiji, 2004; and Turkey, 2005); social security and assistance systems (Brazil, 2007; Bahrain, 2007; Cuba, 2005; Georgia, 2005; Indonesia, 2004; and Republic of Korea, 2005); safety nets (Republic of Korea, 2005), including food security (Colombia, 2005) and care (Algeria, 2005; Saudi Arabia, 2005); training (Algeria, 2005; Colombia, 2005; and Cuba, 2005); health (Ghana, 2003; and Kazakhstan, 2005) and rehabilitation (Lebanon, 2003).

B. Millennium Development Goal monitoring and data on disability

15. The paucity of data on disability, as well as the wide variance of definitions, standards and methodologies used to identify the conditions of persons with disabilities continue to constitute an obstacle to the effective formulation of disability-inclusive policies and programmes, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In many developed countries, disability statistics remain underdeveloped. Few countries collect information on disability through either censuses or surveys. To a significant extent, the dearth of socio-economic data on persons with disabilities reflects the social welfare and/or medical approach to disability that still prevails in many countries.

16. The following is an overview of available global data concerning the situation of persons with disabilities and the Millennium Development Goal indicators.

Goal 1: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

17. Approximately 426 million people with disabilities in developing countries live below the poverty line and often represent the 15 to 20 per cent most vulnerable and marginalized poor in such countries.[5] There is also evidence that participation in the labour force of persons with disabilities is significantly lower than for persons without disabilities.[6]

18. Furthermore, persons with disabilities may have a lower standard of living than persons without disabilities with the same income, owing to their special need for services, such as transportation, heating, or medical services and adaptive devices. While the standard of living rises with income, households with greater needs because of the disability of one of its members tend to have a lower standard of living than that of other households with similar income.[7]

Goal 2: achieve universal primary education

19. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization estimates that, of the 75 million children of primary school age who are out of school, one third are children with disabilities and that over 90 per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school.[8]

Goal 3: promote gender equality and empower women

20. The educational needs of girls with disabilities have yet to be taken into account by those who work to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as those who work in the field of disability. In this context, there has

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[5] Facts on Disability in the World of Work (Geneva, International Labour Organization, November 2007).

[6] Tony Power, *Recognizing ability: the skills and productivity of persons with disabilities — Literature Review*, Employment Working Paper No. 3, International Labour Organization, 2008.

[7] Jeanine Braithwaite and Daniel Mont, *Disability and Poverty: A Survey of World Bank Poverty Assessments and Implications* (HDNSP, the World Bank, February 2008), Discussion Paper No. 0805.

[8] "Children with Disabilities" United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) web page: http://www.unesco.org/en/inclusive-education/children-with-disabilities, accessed on 11 June 2009.

been limited research, as well as policy and programme development. Available data, mostly focused on literacy, indicate that women and girls with disabilities fare less well in the educational arena than either their male with disabilities or female without disabilities counterparts.[9] While the literacy rate for adults with disabilities is as low as 3 per cent, in some countries, it is as low as 1 per cent for women with disabilities.[10] Moreover, due to the lack of gender and disability-sensitized vocational training and counselling, as well as limited access to mathematics, science and technology for girls in general education, girls and women with disabilities are ill-prepared for the world of work.[9]

21. In the area of employment, men with disabilities are almost twice as likely to have jobs as women with disabilities. The general trend is to have special initiatives for people with disabilities but without targeting women with disabilities.[11]

Goal 4: reduce child mortality

22. Of the 200 million children reported to be living with disabilities, few of those living in developing countries have access to health and rehabilitation or support services. For example, they may miss out on vaccinations, or treatment for simple fever or diarrhoea, easily curable illnesses which can become life-threatening if left untreated.[12]

Goal 5: improve maternal health

23. Many persons with disabilities marry and have children but often lack access to sexual and reproductive health information and services.[13] As a consequence, their sexual and reproductive health has been neglected. People who are blind, deaf, or have intellectual or cognitive impairments find that information on sexual and reproductive health is often inaccessible to them. Moreover, because of the lack of physical access and of disability-related technical and human supports, as well as due to stigma and discrimination, sexual and reproductive health services are often inaccessible.[13] Poverty further limits access to basic health services, including rehabilitation.

Goal 6: combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

24. A growing literature indicates that individuals with disabilities are at equal or increased risk of exposure to all known risk factors.[14] Due to a number of reasons, including insufficient access to appropriate HIV prevention and support services,

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[9] Harilyn Rousso, "Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality, Education for All: a gender and disability perspective" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, April 2003).

[10] "Children with Disabilities" UNESCO web page: http://www.unesco.org/en/inclusive-education/children-with-disabilities, accessed on 11 June 2009.

[11] *The right to decent work of persons with disabilities* (Geneva, Switzerland, International Labour Organization, November 2007).

[12] *Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities* (Florence, Italy, United Nations Children's Fund, Innocenti Digest No. 13. ISBN: 978-88-89129-60-9, October 2007).

[13] *Sexual and reproductive health of persons with disabilities* (New York, United States of America, United Nations Population Fund, 2008).

[14] Nora Groce, *HIV/AIDS and Disability: Capturing Hidden Voices: The World Bank/Yale University Global Survey on HIV/AIDS and Disability* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2004).

many persons with disabilities engage in behaviours which place them at risk of HIV infection. Moreover, a large percentage of persons with disabilities will experience sexual assault or abuse during their lifetime, with women and girls, persons with intellectual impairments and those in specialized institutions, schools or hospitals being at particularly high risk. At the same time, services offered at clinics, hospitals and in other locations may be physically inaccessible, lack sign language facilities or fail to provide information in alternative formats such as Braille, audio or "easy-to-understand" language.[15]

Goal 7: ensure environmental sustainability

25. An estimated 80 per cent of all people in the world with disabilities live in rural areas of developing countries and have limited or no access to the services they need.[16] An important factor in accessibility to water is proximity. The benefits can be tangible as proximity allows functionally disabled people to draw water by themselves; restricted access to water and sanitation services leads to a much higher risk for persons with disabilities for contracting diseases.[17] In situations of disasters, persons with disabilities are doubly vulnerable on account of impairments and poverty, yet, they are often ignored or excluded at all levels of disaster preparedness, mitigation and intervention.[18]

C. Actions and initiatives towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities by Member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations

1. Member States

26. The present section provides a summary of the 29 submissions received from Governments in response to the note verbale of 22 April 2009, in which the Secretariat requested information on views and experience in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and on lessons learned and synergies and complementarities achieved based on the implementation of the World Programme of Action, the Standard Rules and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Submissions were received from the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Jamaica, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Malta, Mexico, Montenegro, the Philippines, Peru, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Spain, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago and Ukraine.

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[15] "Disability and HIV Policy Brief: Disability and HIV" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, World Health Organization and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, April 2009).

[16] "Facts on Disability in the World of Work" (International Labour Organization, Geneva, November 2007).

[17] Ronald Wiman and Jim Sandhu, *Integrating Appropriate Measures for People with Disabilities in the Infrastructure Sector* (National Research and Development Center for Welfare and Health, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit and The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2004).

[18] *World Disasters Report 2007: Focus on Discrimination* (Geneva, Switzerland, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2007).

27. Several Governments indicate that they intended to achieve objectives of the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities through the implementation of the Convention. Those efforts are discussed in more detail in the report of the Secretary-General to the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly entitled "Status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto" (A/64/128). Therefore, the present section focuses on those areas that relate directly to the Millennium Development Goals, such as poverty reduction, education and health. The goal of global partnership is then addressed in the context of regional and international cooperation on disability issues.

Poverty

28. Persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to poverty. Providing financial support to persons with disabilities and their families who have limited resources is a policy approach common to countries such as Argentina, China, Cyprus, Ecuador, Egypt, Kyrgyz Republic, Latvia, Montenegro, Portugal and Thailand. The Kyrgyz Republic recently increased the part of its budget devoted to subsidizing access to services and residential facilities for persons with disabilities. The Philippines provides benefits and privileges on basic commodities, medicines and health services available. The Russian Federation recently adopted an act which aims at increasing the social protection of persons with disabilities.

29. Employment is an important component of poverty-reduction strategies. Several Member States have established employment quotas and provide economic incentives, as well as vocational training (see the following section) to increase the employability and employment of persons with disabilities. In Argentina, it is mandatory that at least 4 per cent of the employees in public entities be persons with disabilities. Bolivia requires that 4 per cent of the employees of companies that do business with the Government be persons with disabilities. In China, several cities have adopted similar quota requirements. Egypt reserves 5 per cent of Government positions for persons with disabilities, as does Jamaica. In Peru, all national Government entities are required to promote the employment of persons with disabilities. The Philippines is renewing policies for the equalization of opportunities and sustainable employment for persons with disabilities. Togo has provisions for the recruitment and employment of persons with disabilities in public administration.

30. Member States also provide economic incentives to increase employment and encourage entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities. Argentina gives economic support to microentrepreneurs with disabilities. Egypt encourages young persons with disabilities to become involved in small enterprises, productive family projects, women's projects and other initiatives. Egypt has established professional evaluation centres to assist persons with disabilities to choose professions, as well as rehabilitation centres that train and assist persons with disabilities in (re)joining the labour market. Jamaica assists persons with disabilities in establishing their own businesses. Malta credits employers for three years of national insurance contributions for employing persons with disabilities. Portugal's programme for setting up individually owned businesses is aimed at supporting and encouraging persons with disabilities to set up their own viable businesses. Spain instituted a General Strategy for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities 2008-2012, which includes time frames and programmatic and budgetary measures aimed at removing

physical, legal and sociocultural barriers to the employment of persons with disabilities. Ukraine carries out occupational rehabilitation and job training in 63 occupations for persons with disabilities.

Education

31. In order to achieve equal opportunities in education for children and adults with disabilities, several Governments have endorsed the principle and concept of inclusive education. Argentina passed a national education law that guarantees inclusive education through universal policies, and provides higher education scholarships for persons with disabilities. Cyprus is focusing on vocational training. Ecuador is establishing a National Project of Inclusive Education. Greece is considering a pilot project on sign language interpretation to enable students with hearing disabilities to follow regular classes. Similarly, Hungary is preparing a parliamentary act which will recognize the Hungarian sign language as an official language. Jamaica is seeking to make education more accessible and inclusive through its National Policy on Special Education. The Kyrgyz Republic is promoting inclusive education and has increased the access of regular schools to children with disabilities. Malta extended its financial support so that students with disabilities can receive the necessary support, even when attending private schools. Montenegro is taking measures to ensure inclusion and accessibility of all children and youth with disabilities into education programmes. The Philippines is in the process of improving accessibility of the environment and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education.

Gender equality

32. Argentina has implemented a programme that promotes awareness and provides training on the rights of women with disabilities for the members of the National Council on Women and the National Advisory Commission for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities. Greece supports NGOs the activities of which contribute to empowering women from socially vulnerable groups who suffer multiple discriminations, including women with disabilities. Portugal is carrying out a study of the scope and depth of discrimination experienced by women with disabilities, with the main objective of finding solutions to preventing such discrimination. In 2006, Spain established a plan of action for women with disabilities.

Health

33. In Argentina, the National Advisory Commission for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities established a comprehensive cross-sectoral health plan with the aim of adapting health and sanitation services to the needs of persons with disabilities. Ecuador adopted measures for the early detection of childhood health conditions that could cause disabilities or are disability-related, including the purchase of medical equipment and the training of professional staff providing medical services to children with disabilities. Latvia developed policy guidelines and an action plan for the reduction of disability and its consequences. Mexico's Programme of Integral Health Care for Persons with Disabilities, established in 2008, focuses on prevention, early detection, timely intervention and rehabilitation, as well as ensuring that persons with disabilities enjoy the right to the highest attainable level of health care without discrimination. Montenegro is implementing

measures to ensure equal access to medical facilities for persons with disabilities. The Philippines initiated efforts to mainstream disability issues in the mandates and programme of work of the Department of Health and its Committee on Disability is promoting inclusion of disability in every local Government unit in order to address specific health requirements of persons with disabilities, especially women and children with disabilities. In Portugal, preventing disabilities is an integral part of prenatal and post-natal care. Togo has programmes to prevent blindness.

Regional and international cooperation

34. Australia launched a disability-inclusive development assistance programme, entitled "Development for All", in November 2008. It is the first strategy to guide Australia's aid programme towards development that includes and deliberately focuses on persons with disabilities through a targeted and sequenced approach. A survey of Australia's support for disability-inclusive development to date will be forthcoming in a companion volume to the "Development for All" strategy.

35. Bolivia and the Japan International Cooperation Agency are collaborating in the establishment of a registry of persons with disabilities to serve as a basis for future plans and projects. China has been actively undertaking international exchange and cooperation in the field of disability, and has provided various forms of aid and assistance to a number of developing countries. The Czech Republic funds disability-focused projects within the framework of its development cooperation and humanitarian aid in India, Mongolia, Serbia and Viet Nam.

36. Disability is one of the priorities of the overall strategy for Danish development cooperation, Partnership 2000. The strategy promotes a rights-based approach to poverty reduction. A variety of activities directly targeted at persons with disabilities have been supported through voluntary and earmarked contributions to a range of United Nations organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Bilateral assistance is also provided through embassy grants and support to Danish NGOs which work with local organizations of persons with disabilities.

37. The Finnish Development Policy Programme recognizes persons with disabilities as one of the most vulnerable groups and has made the promotion of their rights and opportunities a cross-cutting objective of all Finnish development cooperation projects.

38. Kenya hosted the Africa Regional Conference on Millennium Development Goals and Disability in September 2008, with over 200 representatives from all over the African continent. The conference was organized by the United Nations Millennium Campaign office in Africa, the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network, the secretariat of the African Decade for Persons with Disabilities and the African Community Development Foundation and its purpose was to strengthen the organizational, advocacy and networking skills of disability leaders with reference to development issues.

39. The Republic of Korea plans to hold several international conferences, including the 20th Asian Conference on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in 2011; the Rehabilitation International World Assembly in 2012; the final review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (2003-2012); and the Asia Pacific Disability Forum.

40. Thailand is committed to advancing regional cooperation. It established, with the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Asia-Pacific Development Centre on Disability, which carries out cooperation programmes with countries in the region. The Centre, which was established in 2002, hosted in February 2009 the first Asia-Pacific Conference on "Community-based Inclusive Development: Persons with disabilities and their families" in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and several NGOs. Thailand was also the main sponsor of the resolution adopted at the sixty-fourth session of ESCAP on "Regional Implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action and Biwako Plus Five towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific".

2. United Nations system

41. The primary goal of the United Nations system with respect to the Millennium Development Goals is to support Governments and civil society in the realization of the Goals at the country level. The United Nations system also undertakes a range of activities at the regional and global levels that fosters development at the national level. The synergy between the three levels contributes to the effectiveness of the overall effort and the achievement of the Goals.

42. Many entities of the United Nations system have been working together to mainstream a disability perspective in their policy frameworks and programming. The Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established in December 2007, at the request of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board on Coordination, and works to ensure that the programmes and policies of the United Nations system are inclusive of persons with disabilities. To this end, the Group has drawn up a joint statement of commitment and is finalizing a draft common strategy and action plan that will constitute the basis for the concerted and coordinated work of the United Nations system related to persons with disabilities. The work of the Group focuses on policies, programmes, capacity-building, research and access to knowledge and accessibility, as well as on supporting the work of the Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

43. As Governments strive to build capacity and create policy frameworks that are consistent with meeting the Millennium Development Goals, United Nations country teams are often invited to provide support. The United Nations Development Group task team on disability — the core group of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Labour Organization (ILO) — are working with the United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office to develop guidelines on disability for the United Nations country teams. Below are examples of how United Nations entities work to further the realization of the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities.

Poverty

44. ILO has undertaken a range of knowledge development, advocacy, capacity-building and technical cooperation initiatives to promote the "Decent Work for People with Disabilities" agenda. Its project, entitled "Promoting the employability

and employment of persons with disabilities through effective legislation" supports the review and reform of disability-related training on employment laws and policies and their effective implementation in selected countries of East and Southern Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

Education

45. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has undertaken a series of activities to promote the Education for All agenda and issued a series of policy guidelines for inclusion in education at its International Conference on Education, held at Geneva from 25 to 28 November 2008, which was devoted to "Inclusion: the Way of the Future". UNESCO also produced a DVD entitled "A World for Inclusion: Ensuring Education for All through the UN Disability Convention", which used footage from Finland, Kenya and Turkey to address the situation of children with disabilities worldwide and the importance of getting them into school.

46. As an integral part of the Child-Friendly School Initiative, UNICEF offers other United Nations agencies and partners an opportunity to further support country efforts to achieve Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals. UNICEF also supports the integration of equity and inclusion issues in the development, revision and appraisal of education sector plans, with a special focus on the most disadvantaged children in society, including children with disabilities. The support methodology is currently being piloted in the Kyrgyz Republic, Lesotho and Malawi.

47. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is developing a strategy to address the educational needs of refugee children and adolescents with disabilities in collaboration with civil society organizations.

Gender equality

48. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in collaboration with the Wellesley Centres for Women, published "Disability Rights, Gender, and Development: A Resource Tool for Action". The publication is based on a training programme developed for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Further efforts include the recently released report by UNDP entitled "Pacific sisters with disabilities: at the intersection of discrimination". The report aims to identify the issues and challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities in the Asia and Pacific region and to analyse social and economic factors impacting their human rights.

49. The UNFPA Strategic Plan 2008-2011 provides guidance to UNFPA staff to ensure that persons with disabilities participate in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of culturally and gender-sensitive policies and programmes. In the Asia and Pacific region, UNFPA supports initiatives for women with temporary or permanent disabilities resulting from gender-based violence. In Swaziland, UNFPA provides support to training gender-based violence counsellors and educators to provide services to persons with hearing and speech disabilities.

Infant health

50. In Croatia, UNICEF is carrying out a public campaign, entitled "First three are even more important", to raise awareness of the need for early interventions and access to community-based support services for children with disabilities. The campaign is part of a wider project entitled "Rights, difficulties and opportunities of children with disabilities and their parents", whereby UNICEF works with hospital maternity wards and paediatricians to increase their sensitivity when working with parents and newborn babies, as well as children with disabilities, to provide them with accurate information, and support planning and implementation of community-based services.

51. In cooperation with UNICEF, WHO is in the process of developing a manual for health-care providers working with children with disabilities (0-6 years) who experience participation restrictions as a result of their disability. WHO is also developing a road map for enhancing the development of children who may experience developmental delays and associated disabilities. The road map focuses on the needs of countries with minimal resources and addresses nutritional, medical, psychological and social risks of children experiencing developmental delay, including possible interventions.

Maternal health

52. WHO has been promoting maternal health of women with disabilities within the framework of community-based rehabilitation. It has also produced a global review of the literature on the mental health aspects of women's reproductive health to help to meet the mental health needs of women during their sexual and reproductive lives.[19] UNFPA is currently working with WHO to finalize a guidance note intended to help United Nations country offices and development partners to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in policies and programmes on a broad array of issues on sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, maternal health, HIV prevention and the fight against gender-based violence. In Bangladesh and Nepal, UNFPA has supported efforts to treat women who suffer from pregnancy-related disabilities, such as obstetric fistula and uterine prolapse.

HIV/AIDS

53. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), WHO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have developed a policy brief on disability and HIV, which explores this often neglected intersection and contains policy recommendations. The brief discusses actions that need to be taken so that persons with disabilities have access to inclusive HIV services that are tailored to their diverse needs, and are also equal to the services available to others in the community.

3. Non-governmental organizations

54. Among the various initiatives undertaken by NGOs, the following two stand out:

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[19] *Mental health aspects of women's reproductive health: A global review of the literature*, World Health Organization, 2009.

(a) The International Disability and Development Consortium launched a website (www.IncludeEverybody.org) with support from the United Nations Millennium Campaign, which provides information on disability and the Millennium Development Goals; and (b) Inclusion International developed its own set of development goals based upon the Millennium Development Goals: "Inclusion International's MDGs: Vision and Targets for 2015".[20] These goals are similar to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, but are directed towards persons with disabilities and their families. Inclusion International also provides information about poverty-reduction efforts directed at persons with disabilities and inclusive education.[21]

III. Conclusions and recommendations

55. **While there has been general progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, it is difficult to assess whether and how much persons with disabilities have benefited. This reflects two basic facts. One is that available data show that policies and programmes related to the Millennium Development Goals have not fully addressed or specifically included disability and persons with disabilities. The other is the difficulties, both conceptual and practical, in obtaining sufficient and appropriate data on the situation of persons with disabilities. At the same time, while the data are limited, the information that does exist indicates that, in general, persons with disabilities are much worse off than the rest of the population.**

56. **The Millennium Development Goals were adopted at the Millennium Summit in the year 2000, six years before the adoption by the General Assembly in 2006 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The entry into force of the Convention provides an opportunity to invigorate this overlooked issue and aspect of development. The Millennium Development Goal policies and implementation can therefore be strengthened by the Convention's normative standards and framework.**[22]

57. **In particular, the Convention states that the issue of accessibility for persons with disabilities is critical. This includes access to the physical environment and infrastructure, information and social services, particularly education and health care, as well as all participatory processes. Therefore, a logical step in both the development process and in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities in economic and social development is that the issue of accessibility should permeate all policies and activities in realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities.**

58. **International cooperation and the implementation of Millennium Development Goal 8, a global partnership for development, is crucial for the realization of the Millennium Development Goals for all, particularly for persons with disabilities. Cooperation efforts must ensure, in all Millennium**

[20] Inclusion International, "Hear our Voices: A Global Report — People with an Intellectual Disability and their Families Speak Out on Poverty and Exclusion", November 2006.

[21] www.inclusion-international.org/en/.

[22] See for instance "From exclusion to equality: realizing the rights of persons with disabilities", Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, United Nations, 2007.

Development Goal policies and implementation, access to and participation of persons with disabilities as both agents and beneficiaries of development. Accessibility is crucial to their participation as well as to benefiting from development, and in this regard, there is a great opportunity for international cooperation to have a strong and effective impact. Recently, in response to the adoption and ratification of the Convention, there have been several initiatives to integrate persons with disabilities into international cooperation at both the bilateral and multilateral levels. Cooperation with the private sector is also important to make available the benefits of new technologies, especially accessible information and communications technologies for all, for persons with disabilities.

59. **In the light of the above, the General Assembly may wish to:**

(a) **Encourage Governments to develop and accelerate exchanges of information, experiences and practices regarding the situation of persons with disabilities and policy approaches to particular disability issues, particularly as they relate to accessibility. These exchanges may be particularly productive at the regional level, where countries may have similar socio-economic or cultural backgrounds with regard to the situations relating to persons with disabilities;**

(b) **Emphasize that participation of persons with disabilities at all levels of policymaking and development is critical to informing policymakers of the situation of persons with disabilities, the barriers they may face and ways to overcome obstacles to the full enjoyment of their rights, to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities and for their socio-economic advancement;**

(c) **Encourage Governments to use the current 2010 census round, in which country population censuses will be conducted within the next three to five years, to fill some of the information and data gaps regarding the living conditions for persons with disabilities;**

(d) **Recognizing that censuses take time and often may not include sufficient detail regarding persons with disabilities, urge Governments to carry out surveys on the situation of persons with disabilities with respect to the Millennium Development Goals and specific disability-related barriers preventing their attainment.**